

Extracts from “Watchers of a Beacon”

THE STORY OF
THE KESWICK AND COCKERMOUTH METHODIST CIRCUIT

A CENTENARY SOUVENIR

1854 - 1954

By

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Editor's note:

Below are interesting extracts from the publication. Please download or read the 24 page booklet available online at

www.kcmethodists.org.uk or

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I have included extracts from Baptisms Records held at Cumbria Archives
Occupations & Trades around Brigham Chapel, Broughton & Dearham 1893-1910

Peter Nicholson 23 Feb 2013

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William Grimshaw could find no excuse for absenteeism from worship; if his members stayed away from Church, he would go and hold a service, and preach in front of their homes. On more than one occasion, he is reputed to have seized a whip, and then marched round his parish, gathering in the idle and the Sabbath-breakers. and driving them in front of him to the Church!

Preachers stationed in the Whitehaven Circuit during those years included Thomas Wride - a man of parts, whose gifts ranged from the prescribing of herbal remedies to clock mending, and even the invention of a primitive alarm-clock by an ingenious arrangement of fire-irons!

Cockermouth in 1780, Wesley writes: "At eight I preached in the Town Hall, but to the poor only; the rich could not rise so soon"!

£51-10-6 had been collected from societies in the section to help finance Methodist missionary work in North America. France and Gibraltar, in the infant missionary stations in India, and among the **"barbarous inhabitants" of New Zealand!**

A tiny chapel had been erected at Pardshaw - the first country preaching-place to be built in the present circuit. It was built on ground given by Mrs. Ann Wood, of Pardshaw Hall, six of whose children died between the ages of 20 and 24, but whose surviving son and grand-daughters gave life-long service to Methodism in Pardshaw.

1830s, Primitive Methodists ... One enthusiastic member walked the thirteen miles from Keswick carrying a heavy corner-cupboard on his back, to make a pulpit for the preacher.

1830, Cockermouth received a visit from three Primitive Methodist ministers stationed in Carlisle; their visit took the form of a great camp meeting held on Papcastle Common, near Belle Vue - while in the evening. there was a lovefeast held at the Old Theatre at the Sun Barn in the town.

1830s There is also a tradition, in Eaglesfield, of Methodist services being held in one of the several smithies then established in the village.

Eaglesfield in the early 1830s. Services were held in the largest of a number of weaving shops standing near a ruinous ivy-covered cottage-somewhat inaptly nicknamed 'Paradise - standing by the roadside at the south end of the village. One preacher noted that the stairs up to this room were so rickety that they had to be propped up for safety.

At Dearham, a great "character" and local preacher-Tyson Rigg, the mole-catcher-had been holding services in his house for some years prior to the building of the first chapel in 1833.

1833 also saw the building and opening of the little chapel at Greysouthen, which was completed at a cost of £161.

Atkinson Steele came on to full plan in 1831: he then lived at Workington, and would walk regularly the twelve miles from his home to Lorton, or the fifteen miles from Workington to Mawbray, to take services-and then walk home again the same evening. Those were the days when even a Horse-Hire Fund was an unheard-of novelty.

1835 Warrenite agitation fermenting throughout Methodism ... there was such tension during the service at Keswick that the minister-the Rev. Philip Hardcastle, Superintendent of the Wigton Circuit - had to leave the pulpit to take up the collection himself -the stewards having apparently, "gone on strike" for the day!

Appointed to Keswick was the Rev. Edmund B. Warters, a young man of sterling qualities. Once a month, he had to preach in the circuit Chapel at Wigton; he would set out on foot. on the Saturday, to meet his Superintendent-the Rev. Robert Morton - who would be journeying to Keswick on a donkey; when they met, Mr. Warters rode the donkey back to Wigton, while Mr. Morton proceeded on foot to Keswick. The same thing happened in reverse on the return journey on the Monday. One Superintendent of the Wigton Circuit, who had a flair for doggerel, described the journey between Wigton and Keswick in the following terms:

The road was impassable.
Not even jackassable:
And all who would travel it
Must turn out and gravel it!

Francis Ward, determined to procure a circuit pony for the use of the ministers. He was thwarted. however. by our old friend, Tyson Rigg of Dearham, who bitterly opposed the idea, and said: "'I love my neighbour as myself; I walk to my appointments. and I should like my neighbour to walk to his"!

1839 A small society had been formed at Bassenthwaite, numbering two believers and one on trial. Another small society had arisen in the Embleton valley. This latter group met in the kitchen of Byersteads Farm.

1840 services were held in a cottage at Eskin, Wythop, the home of Mr. Daniel Mandale, despite the threat of one belligerent inhabitant of the hamlet to shoot any Methodist preacher who came to take a service - a threat, fortunately, never carried out.

Messrs. Grainger and Minnican, both of whom would frequently spend whole nights in prayer for Lorton, and who also practised the declining custom of fasting.

Robert Minnican once found himself in the Market Street pulpit at Cockermouth - a somewhat unusual occurrence; but, being in no sense overawed by the solemnity of the

occasion, he said, plainly, to his hearers: "You may be used to wheaten-bread here, but this morning you must put up with barley-bread"!

In 1847, Grange makes its first appearance on the circuit returns-showing two members of society, and two more "on trial." Services were held in the kitchen of Mr. Thomas Threlkeld's house-and they continued to be held regularly on his property for nearly fifty years. until a Chapel was built.

At Eaglesfield, a Chapel was built and opened in 1845. It was very much a local effort - stone being given from an adjoining building which was being taken down; local farmers helped by carting materials to and from the scene of operations, and many members of the society gave voluntary help to the building work after their ordinary day's labour was done. Henry Dallon, when the Chapel was in use, by striking up the note for the hymns on his pitch-pipe!

Superintendents of the Workington Circuit included Joseph Jackson - "a good man, but handicapped by being a heavy drinker"; Moses Rayner of whom a biographer declared: "He was humble, meek. forbearing, merciful, peaceable. fatherly, brotherly, sympathetic. helpful, humane, candid, good-tempered, true, honest, just, pure, lovely: he bore all things. believed all things, hoped all things. endured all things; was gentle, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." From that description, one feels it may safely be assumed that Moses Rayner was a good man!

Edward Baylis. Of the last-named, it is recorded that he remained a bachelor all his life, and "if you had seen how far he reached his hand out to shake hands with a lady-you wouldn't have been surprised"!

Cockermouth in 1849-50 at a time when severe cholera was raging; there were many deaths and - a fact probably not unconnected - a great increase in both the number of, and attendance at, prayer meetings.

In 1851, the Primitive Methodists society in Cockermouth finally bought the High Sand Lane Chapel from the Wesleyans; a slightly vernacular entry in the Trust account book of the Wesleyan society shows the sum of £95 being received from the sale of the old Chapel to "The Ranters."

The Superintendent of the Primitive Methodist Circuit, who lived at Whitehaven, was a notable character named Joseph Spoor, who had the distinction of being as bald as a coot. One day, at an open-air meeting, a wag called out, "If thoo'll let ma shy coins at thee shiny pate, I'll pitch silver at tha' "!" Mr. Spoor readily consented, thus assuring himself of a good collection!

A local preacher Joseph Jobling ... a Primitive Methodist society in Keswick in the mid-1850s. He secured a room over a stable in Head's Lane, Keswick and carefully gathered and

nurtured there a growing society, despite vehement interruptions from the gentleman who used the stable below the meeting-room, and who-perhaps not unnaturally-objected strongly to Mr. Jobling's custom of emphasising points in his sermons by repeated stamping of the feet!

The Rev. Robert Brown, junior minister of the Workington Wesleyan Circuit, was stationed in Cockermouth in 1852. He was much exercised, both in mind and feet, by the great distances involved in travelling over the wide circuits of West Cumberland: and he devised a plan: Workington ceased to be a circuit on its own - rejoined to Whitehaven; Cockermouth became a circuit, together with Keswick; and Maryport joined Wigton Circuit, in place of Keswick. Thus, the Cockermouth and Keswick Circuit was born in August 1854, and the beacon was now at full blaze.

1854 Prominent among the workers at Keswick was good Richard Bowman who, it seems, made a regular habit of having an apple lying on his table which he would sell to visitors for a penny in aid of the missionary box - afterwards begging the apple back again to do further service!

The Rev. William Unsworth was stationed in Keswick in 1856 when a great flood swept through, and submerged. the whole Vale of Keswick. It was caused by a heavy fall of snow, a sudden thaw, and then pouring rain; its effect was to make all the trees look like thorn bushes and completely suspend all traffic between Keswick and Cockermouth.

Keswick old Chapel in the yard was, no doubt, the abode of angels, but, at the same time. it was a remarkably difficult spot in which ordinary mortals could meet and be comfortable. It was hard to find, and - when found-hard to enter without risking damage to life or limb due - among other things - to the loose boulders with which the entry was paved. Furthermore. just behind the Chapel, was an old tallow candle-maker's shop and the persistent fragrance emanating therefrom was a seriously disturbing element in the weeknight meetings. A few more years had yet to roll by. however, before a new Chapel appeared.

... Greysouthen, where the membership had reached the astronomical figure of 40 - to Scales, where Joseph Herd and Jacob Allison were tending the flock well. The farm-house kitchen services at Grange were by now well established, and at Brigham - in the Cockermouth section - a small chapel was built and opened in 1856.

In 1858, the fortnightly services at Applethwaite were discontinued ... partly due, it seems, to the dubious practice of allowing the meeting-room to be used by another denomination - in this case, the Baptists- on alternate Sundays. As the minister in charge at the time remarked: "I do not think this arrangement answered well: two farmers on one farm is not likely to suit both parties: to whom does the produce belong?" At any rate, the Methodists vacated the hamlet as a preaching-place, and have not since returned.

1862 there was dissent among the local preachers - some of whom objected to the name of a certain brother being retained on the circuit Plan after he had bought premises in Cockermouth for the making and selling of alcoholic liquor [sic]. There was heated controversy over the matter in the local preachers' meeting, and, in the end, several preachers tendered their resignations.

1867 the Rev. Thomas Brighthouse was appointed to Cockermouth as Superintendent. He was greatly loved as a Christian gentleman, and a living illustration of the fruits of the Spirit. He was an intimate friend of the Superintendent of the Maryport Primitive Methodist Circuit the Rev. Adam Dodds. They were often together at meetings in Cockermouth, and an unbiased observer once remarked that in business meetings any bitterness was immediately dispelled by the kindly words of Mr. Brighthouse and the tears of Mr. Dodds.

1876 was also a year when "revival" was in the air. Under the ministry of the Rev. Gregory Renton, the Wesleyans in Keswick received numerous converts some of whom later became prominent workers in the Chapel. In Cockermouth, the Primitive Methodists under the ministry of the Rev. Matthew Johnson, were also tasting the joys of revival and the High Sand Lane Chapel was filled with converts; the official records state that "souls were saved, night after night, for several months."

1879 - at about this time the Pardshaw Chapel underwent renovation and a much-needed porch was erected to keep out the keen east wind which sometimes threatened to blow the preacher out of the pulpit.

At Great Broughton also the old Chapel had proved too small for the work so a new Chapel and Sunday School were built on a close of land near to the old site. It was rumoured that the new buildings were erected on what was once the old Broughton Cockpit

In 1898, an organ was installed in the tiny Chapel at Sunderland with Miss Bewsher assuming the duties of organist. This arrangement was much to the liking of the local preachers, some of whom told almost libellous stories of the singing accomplishments of the congregation! A new harmonium was installed in the Keswick Church during the same year; the circuit seemed to be becoming suddenly music-conscious.

in 1898, new ground was broken at Threlkeld Quarry, and in May of that year, services were commenced in the new Day School, kindly loaned to the circuit for the purpose by the directors of the Quarry. A Sunday School was also begun.

The membership returns of the circuit, as at December 31st, 1900, are of interest; they were as follows :-Cockermouth, 103; Dearham, 29; Greysouthen, 2; Brigham, 7; Great Broughton,

22; Lorton, 4; Embleton, 8; Eaglesfield, 12; Pardshaw, 11; Sunderland, 4; Keswick. 90; Braithwaite, 19; Grange, 27; Threlkeld Quarry, 14; Bassenthwaite, 4.

1931 The stonelaying of the new Lorton Street Church at Cockermouth took place in 1931, and on April 26th, 1932, the Church was opened The whole premises cost about £7,000. In the following year. the old Market Street Chapel was sold to the Urban District Council for £325, and it now fulfils the distinguished role of Town Hall.

It is impossible to close this section without paying tribute to certain stalwarts who are still serving the circuit, after many years, and whose faithfulness shall surely merit the promised reward of the Crown of Life.

May there yet be many more who, ***having lit their torch of faith from this Methodist beacon among the Cumbrian mountains, shall go forth to hold it high.***

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People and Occupations

1796 The trustees of whom there were nine-were as follows: George Robinson. cooper; Matthew Smith. gentleman; Isaac Brown, grocer; George Bowe, hatter; James Wilson, tailor and staymaker; John Brockbank, farmer; Robert Dickinson, Iron-works writer: James Sykes, staymaker: and Stephen Wilson, cabinet-maker.

1823, the trust of the Cockermouth Chapel was renewed, the new trustees being John Richardson, common brewer; Tyson Rigg, molecatcher; William Todhunter, painter and glazier; William Armstrong, weaver; George Hodgson, tailor; Peter Thompson, bricklayer; Joseph Thompson, clock and watch-maker; Joseph Bushby, gentleman; and Richard Bowman, shoemaker.

1851, Primitive Methodist trustees Cockermouth Chapel were Thomas Littleton, farmer; John Bolton, threadmaker; Joseph Blacklock, hairdresser; William Fisher, weaver; Henry T. Frazer, threadmaker; Richard Clucas, hatter: John Ritson, painter; William Murray, miller; and John Clark, dyer.

1885 Primitive Methodists in Cockermouth had been looking for larger premises and eventually found them in the National Schools in New Street. These they purchased for £410 and then spent another £400 converting them into a Chapel. April 23rd 1885. The first trustees were John Clark, mill overlooker: J. T. Campbell. mill overlooker: Thomas Hetherington. tailor; Thomas Thursby tanner: John E. Metcalf, railway clerk: Thomas H. Fletcher, tinsmith; George Ritson, coal agent: William Grave, mill overlooker: Walter Scott, warehouseman: John Hinde, labourer: George Warwick, printer: Thomas M. Wilson, printer: Robert Hurd, labourer: William Rook, tailor; Robert Johnston, labourer: and Henry Williamson, engineman.

Occupations & Trades around Brigham, Broughton & Dearham 1893-1910

Extracted from Baptisms Records Cumbria Archives D/FCM6/3/32

<i>Year</i>	<i>Brigham</i>	<i>Broughton</i>	<i>Dearham</i>
1893	Tailor, Coach Painter, Wood Turner, Sawyer, Cloth Finisher, Spinster, Joiner, Bobbin Turner, Joiner, Blacksmith		
1894	Quarryman, Spinster, Butcher, Roadman, Insurance Agent, Warehouseman, Stone Mason, Joiner	2 Engineers, 5 Miners, Blacksmith	5 Miners, Waggoner, 2 Labourers Farmer, 3 Miners, Grocer, Unstated, Spinster, Gardener
1895	Machine Agent, Groom, Tailor, Wood Turner, Quarryman, Shoemaker, Carrier, Engineer	6 Miners, Schoolmaster, Engine Man, Quarryman	6 Miners, Brick Moulder, Gardener 6 Miners, Spinster, Brick moulder
1897	Roadman, Spinster & Groom, Joiner, Shoemaker, Grocer, Park keeper, Tailor, Quarryman	7 Miners, Brick Moulder	11 Miners, Engineer, Grocer, Farm labourer, Engineer, Labourer
1898	Draper, 3 Tailors, Grocer, Compositor, Coal Merchant, Warehouseman, Coal Merchant	6 Miners, Barman & spinster, 7 Miners Schoolmaster,	(Broughton Moor 8 miners)
1899 - 1900	2 Joiners, Shoemaker, Gardener, Quarryman, Roadman, Minister of the Gospel, Tailor		Miners, 2 Gardener, Provision Dealer, Rtd Grocer, Spinster
1901	2 Shoemakers, Sawmill Labourer, Compositor, Grocers Assistant, Miller, Engine Man		
1904	Grocers Assistant, 3 Minors, Blacksmith, Shift-man, Woollen Spinner		
1905	Blacksmith, 5 miners, grocers assistant, 5 miners, sawing machine agent, grocer, gardener		
1906	5 miners, cloth dresser, 2 farmers		
1907	2 miner, insurance agent, spinster, grocer, colliery banksman		
1909 - 1910	7 miners, assurance agent [sic] miner, blacksmith, carter, insurance agent, butcher, explosive dealer's agent		